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THE MEDICAL MYTHOLOGY OF IRELAND.

BY

JAMES MOONEY.

Read before the American Philosophical Society, April 15, 1887.

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THE MEDICAL MYTHOLOGY OF IRELAND.

By James Mooney, Washington, D. C.

(*Read before the American Philosophical Society, April 15, 1887.*)

NOTE.—The information contained in the following paper has been obtained by the writer's personal investigation among the people who believe and practice the things described, and has not been obtained from books, although numerous works bearing on the subject have been consulted. Every belief and custom described is still in vogue in some part of Ireland, especially in the west. They have even been transplanted to this country, and some of the charms mentioned have been used by Irish men and women for the relief of children at the request of fairly intelligent American parents, while the accidental death of a young man at Holyoke, Mass., some years ago, is attributed by his friends to the evil eye of a Mearnan who was near him at the time. Where inquiry among people of different sections has shown a custom to be general, the fact has been stated, and most of the charms described as local would probably prove to be generally known on further investigation.—THE AUTHOR.

For several reasons the mythologic theory of disease has probably reached its highest development and retained most of its original strength among the people of Ireland. Her national life was crushed into the ground by an alien tyrant while still the gloom of the Dark Ages hovered over Europe, and when the Irish nation itself had hardly emerged from the tribal condition. The island which had been the home and the refuge of scholars during the troubled centuries which followed the fall of the Roman empire was given over to desolation, and the fire kindled upon the altar of learning went out in blood and tears. Laws were enacted against the dress, the language, the very names of the people, and it was held no crime to kill an Irishman. Schools and monasteries were despoiled and their inmates hunted down like wild beasts or banished from the country—the same price was offered for the head of a priest and for the head of a wolf—and for nearly seven hundred years teaching was a treason and education a crime. When at last, within the present century, the laws became at least human, and schools were established throughout the country, the same landlord system against which the Irish people are now fighting fastened them down with a weight of poverty which their utmost exertions were not sufficient to throw off. The people had no time or money to go to school, and therefore remained in a great measure uneducated. In addition to all this must be considered the peculiarly spiritual temper of the Kelt, and especially of the Gael, which inclines him to a strong faith in the things of the invisible world, and renders the Irish nation an eminently religious people. The same qualities, when not properly directed by education, lead naturally to superstition, the religion of ignorance.

If a line three hundred miles long be drawn through the greatest extent of the island, from Inishowen in the north to Cape Clear in the south, it will divide the country into two parts, of nearly equal size. The eastern

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section is a fertile plain, shut in by low mountains along the coast, and being naturally easy of access and more exposed to foreign influence and colonization, its inhabitants have lost much of their original character and nearly all of their language. The western section is chiefly a region of rugged mountains, and limestone cliffs covered with a thin layer of soil, where no one but an Irishman would attempt to raise a crop. Its inhabitants, who are fishermen on the coast and shepherds in the mountains, are still in the primitive condition of their ancestors, retaining in a great degree their simple habits and their Gaelic language. The typical districts of this region are Donegal in the north, Kerry in the south, and Connamara in the extreme west. Here the practices and beliefs which were once general throughout the country still have full sway, the enchanted horse dwells in the lough, and the fairies dance under the hawthorn.

The Practitioners.

In describing these customs and beliefs they will be treated, not as half-forgotten superstitions raked up out of the past, but as living realities, for such they are in fact. The medical professors of this region are generally old women, whose stock in trade consists of a few herbs and simple decoctions, a number of prayers and secret formulas to be recited while applying the remedy, and a great deal of mystery. Such a woman is commonly called a *cailleac' luib'e** "herb hag" or *bean feasac'*† "knowing woman." When her art is of that doubtful kind which tends rather more to the injury than to the good of her neighbors, she is called a *piseog*‡ and the same name is also applied to her nostrums. In some few cases the doctor is a man. There are also a number of persons who have cures for particular diseases, these cures being innate in the individual, owing to some accident of birth, or hereditary and transmitted from parent to child from a remote generation. When hereditary, the secret is jealously guarded—even by the mother from her child—and only revealed upon the deathbed, to some one of the family who, at the same time, is pledged to silence. For this reason it is almost impossible to get the formulas used with any of these cures, but there are a number of charms in use which are common property, and from a knowledge of these the character of the others may be guessed. In rare instances the possessor of a cure bestows it upon another in return for some favor, the charm losing none of its efficacy by the transfer. It is generally considered essential that the charm should have been inherited from a woman by a man, or from a man by a woman. Persons who possess these single cures give their services

* Pronounced *cawl-yakh liva*. The Connamara pronunciation is given, unless otherwise noted. In the Gaelic text the aspirated consonants are indicated by a dot placed after them near the top. When the Irish characters are used the dot is placed above the aspirated consonant, and when the Roman characters are used, as in Scotland, the consonant is followed by an *h*. The *h* is not here used, as it does not properly belong to the Gaelic alphabet, and gives a false appearance of harshness.

† Pronounced *ban fasakh*.

‡ Pronounced *pishoeg*.

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freely, as their powers are looked upon as sacred gifts which would depart from them were a fee demanded, although they may accept a small present. The other class, on the contrary, who are considered as akin to dealers in the black art, act upon the principle of "nothing for nothing." In Connamara it is customary to cross their hand with a two-shilling piece, a silver coin having a cross upon one side, the sacred emblem being supposed to compel them to speak the truth. The herbs are gathered fasting, generally by moonlight, and whisky enters largely into the decoctions.

These practitioners have their specialties, and one who deals with the evil eye will have nothing to do with a fairy sickness, neither will the "fairy woman" meddle with an illness which is due to the influence of the evil eye. It must not be supposed, however, that the people depend entirely upon the skill of these doctors. On the contrary, every housekeeper is well acquainted with the virtues of all the common herbs, to which she never fails to resort in case of need—always accompanying the application with a prayer—and it is only when she has exhausted her resources or is convinced that the sickness is of supernatural origin, that she applies to the *cailleac' luib'e*. When an ailment does not yield readily to simple treatment, it is generally ascribed to one of three causes, viz., the fairies, the evil eye, or witchcraft. The last of these is not often held responsible, as Irish witches usually confine their operations to stealing the butter, and seldom harm the owners. We will speak first of the fairies.

The Sig'efreog and Fairy Influence.

The person, of either sex, who treats illness of fairy origin is called a *sig'efreog*,* the name being probably a diminutive of *sig'efear*,† a "fairy man." In the south they are called *sheefers* or *sheefros*, while in the east they are known as fairy men or women, as the case may be. They have generally obtained their knowledge by a residence of some years with the fairies, who frequently carry off both grown persons and infants, and detain them for three, five or seven years, unless forced to return them sooner. Young mothers and their infants are especially liable to be abducted, and to prevent such a calamity numerous precautions are adopted, which need not be described here. The health—at least of grown persons—is in no way affected by their sojourn among the fairies, while they learn all the secrets of their captors and afterward use this knowledge to defeat their purposes. Although, after returning to their friends, their services are in constant demand to counteract the fairy influence, they are never able to shake it off from themselves, but are frequently called away, even in the dead of night or from the midst of a company, to perform some office for the "good people"—generally to wait upon a fairy mother or her child. The fairies naturally resent the interference of

* Pronounced *sheefroeg*.

† Pronounced *shee-fär*.

the *sig'efreog*, and while gathering her medicinal herbs she is frequently stricken with convulsions and falls to the ground, foaming at the mouth, owing to the violence of her struggles with the invisible beings, who strive to tear the plants from her grasp. In one instance, in the County Clare, they seized a man at night in a lonely place, and beat him so terribly that he was confined to his bed for a week afterward.

In addition to her medical knowledge, the *sig'efreog* can read the thoughts of others, and tell the whereabouts of missing articles, and her powers are often inherited by any of her children who may be born after her return from fairy land. She also warns the people occasionally against doing anything which would incur the ill will of the fairies, such as throwing out dirty water after nightfall, when the elves are engaged at their sports; forgetting to leave clean water on the dresser for them to drink; or saying grace over the potatoes without first setting aside a portion for the fairies, who cannot touch consecrated food. Such is the dread of offending these spirits that they are seldom mentioned under their true name of *sig'e*,* or "fairy," but are generally called *daoine mat'a*,† or "good people," frequently accompanied by the invocation, *Fogramuid deag'-c'om'arsanac't oraib'*,‡ "we beg good neighborship of you."

The supernatural power of the *sig'efreog* is sometimes due to some remarkable cause other than a residence with the fairies. In the County Clare is a wild mountain lake known as Lough Doon, where St. Patrick confined the last of the serpents which still at rare intervals comes out upon the bank. On one of these occasions the serpent was seen by a man who ever afterward "had a cure." There formerly lived near Tuam, in the County Galway, a cripple known as *Dom'nal Crom*,§ or "Crooked Daniel," who, on account of his infirmity, was generally appointed to watch his neighbors' cattle upon the mountain side. While thus engaged one day he saw a bull descend from the heavens and associate with one of the cows. By drinking the first milk drawn from the cow after the birth of the calf he was endowed with a knowledge of fairy doings and the gift of prophecy.‖

A single instance, from east Galway, will serve to illustrate the manner of fairy seizure and rescue. A woman was carried off while her husband was out of the house for a short time, and on his return, instead of the blooming young wife he had loved, he found a shriveled whimpering creature, who would take no care of the child. He was in great trouble over the matter for some time, until one night, as he was coming across

* Pronounced *she*.

† Pronounced *dheenee mōha*.

‡ Pronounced *Fbegramŭj jaw-khoersanakhth ūriv*.

§ Pronounced *Dhonawl Crum*.

‖ This man is referred to on page 83 of Sir Wm. Wilde's valuable and interesting work on Lough Corrib, published in 1867. The account here given was obtained from a native of that vicinity.

the field, he saw his wife standing in the *haggart*.* Going up to her, he asked her, in the name of the Trinity, who had her in their power, and what he must do to rescue her. She told him that she was with the fairies and that there was one way by which he could recover her, if he had sufficient courage to try it. On a certain night and at a certain hour, a company of mounted fairies, with her in their midst, would enter a fairy fort† near his house. He must be ready with some urine and some chicken dung, which he must throw upon her and then seize her. He promised to do as directed, and at the appointed time he was in waiting near the fort. Soon he heard the fairies approaching, and when the noise came in front of him he threw the dung and urine in the direction of the sound, and saw his wife fall from her horse. He seized her, and although the fairies crowded around and strove to tear her away from him, he defied them and held on to her until they gave up the attempt and retired into the fort, when he brought her home with him. At the instant he seized her there came such a blast that "you'd think the wind would sweep the roof from the house," and in the midst of it all the withered hag disappeared and was not seen afterward. The woman lived to a good age and had several children after her return.

The method adopted in this case to break the power of the enchantment is especially to be noted, as it is a cardinal principle in Irish mythology that fairies, being pure spirits, cannot endure defilement. Even a handful of dust thrown into their midst will sometimes cause them to release their hold on a prisoner. The same ingredients enter into most of the charms and amulets used as a protection against the fairies. The chicken, also, is regarded as peculiarly sacred, and some wonderful virtue is connected with everything belonging to it. According to popular belief, the fairies can take anything but a chicken or an egg.

Unusually promising young children—especially infants not yet baptized—are frequently carried off by the fairies, who leave instead what are known to be changelings by their pinched and withered features, their hollow voice, their constant crying and inordinate appetite, and their unnaturally shrewd remarks and actions. In other words, the uninformed observer might think them precocious children in delicate health. In such cases, when there is no longer any doubt in the matter—for mothers are always slow to be convinced of the real truth—the fairy woman is called in to bring back the stolen child. Her usual method is to heat the shovel in the fire, place the changeling upon it and put it out upon the dunghill. She then returns to the house and recites certain words, after which the family go out to the dunghill and find there the real child, in place of the other, which has been taken away again by the fairies. The child seldom

* An outdoor inclosure for storing grain and hay.

† Prehistoric circular earthworks, with underground passages, very numerous throughout the south and west, and popularly believed to be the abode of the fairies. Antiquarians generally regard them as ancient communal village inclosures.

lives long after its return, owing to the rough treatment it receives while in the hands of the fairies.

In this operation we have a combination of fire, iron and dung, the three great safeguards against the influence of fairies and the infernal spirits. Three is also the sacred number in Ireland, as well as throughout Europe. The changeling sometimes leaps through the window at sight of the preparations, and disappears in some unaccountable manner, when the real child is found asleep in the cradle. This method is known throughout the country, but there are also other ways to accomplish the same purpose. In the County Cork the mother, while still fasting, takes the changeling before sunrise to a point where three running streams meet, and after stripping it, dips it into the water three times in the name of the Trinity. This is done on three successive mornings, and on returning home the third morning her real child is restored to her arms as she enters the doorway, the substitution being effected instantaneously by the fairies.

In another instance a young man was suddenly stricken with a rheumatic illness, which confined him to his bed nearly three years. At last one day while his parents were gone to the market he got up and joined the younger children playing outside the house, and was as active as any of them. When it was about time for the parents to return he went back to bed again. The children told the old folks all about it and an elder brother agreed to watch the next day. In the morning the parents started off again, but were hardly out of sight when the sick man was out of bed once more and in the field with the children. The watcher ran toward the house to see if the bed was empty, but with all his swiftness, the rheumatic got there first and was in bed when he entered the door. The brother took up an ax, and approaching the sick man, swore that he would kill him if he did not tell who he was. "Oh, brother," cried the sick man, "don't strike me, for I have only a few more days to serve, and then I will be with you again." The brother desisted and soon after the young man was restored as well and strong as he was three years before. He explained that a servant girl of the family, who had apparently died about a year before the beginning of his illness, was with the fairies, and had warned him not to accept food or drink at their hands. He followed her advice, and at the end of three years, the shortest period of fairy detention, they were consequently obliged to release him, while the girl who had made the fatal mistake of eating with them was never restored. The young man was the son of a respectable farmer named Halpine, in the County Limerick.

This belief in the presence of a fairy changeling in place of the sick person is very general, especially in the case of infants which pine away without apparent cause, strong young men suddenly stricken down, and old persons whose illness is of a fitful and lingering nature. It probably has its origin in the change in disposition and features under such circumstances, and the unwillingness of the people to believe that this can be

the result of natural causes. The supposed fairy is sometimes threatened to force him to reveal his identity, and when the case is evidently hopeless, although the patient still lingers, a piece of *Lus-Mor*,* or foxglove, is put under his bed. If he be a changeling, the fairies will be compelled to restore, at once and in good health, the person taken away. If the invalid be really present in his proper person, he will not recover, but die. The reason of this is, that when the soul, after death, is brought up for judgment, it is sometimes condemned to return and re-animate the body, and endure with it all the miseries of sickness until its sins have been expiated, when it is finally separated from the flesh and enters into eternal happiness. The fairies take advantage of this temporary absence of the soul before the judgment bar to put one of their number into the body so that when the soul returns it finds its place occupied and is obliged to go with them. The presence of the *lus-mor* compels the fairies to take away their spirit from the body and release the soul, which then enters at once into glory. This, of course, is no part of the Catholic belief, but a survival of the old paganism.

Lameness is frequently the result of having intruded upon the precincts of the fairies or interfered with them in some other way. For this reason the people are especially careful not to disturb the fairy forts or venture near them after nightfall. A girl near Feakle, in the County Clare, fell asleep in a fort on a harvest day, and on awaking in the morning found herself unable to walk on account of a painful ulcer on her limb. The fairies had struck her for coming upon their ground. After a long illness something like a thread of flax came out of the wound and she recovered. Ulcers, scrofula and running sores are commonly called "fairy strokes," and attributed to fairy influence. The particles of hardened pus which sometimes come out of the sore are the fairy darts which have caused the wound. A man near Dunmore, in Galway, rented a small farm upon which was a fairy fort, which was overgrown with bushes. As these were never disturbed they at last began to encroach upon the cultivated ground. In spite of the remonstrances of his wife he determined to root out some of them, but had hardly begun the work when he was struck with such a sharp pain in his leg that he fell to the ground and had to be carried into the house and put to bed. His wife went out and replanted the bushes just as they were before, when he at once got relief. This was told by the man himself and confirmed by his wife, who was present and added: "If there is one thing certain, it is that there are fairies in Ireland." He holds a responsible position at a salary of $1300 per year. Near Bandon, in the County Cork, lived a man who in his youth was a noted jumper, and on one occasion leaped across a ditch twenty-two feet in width and alighted in such a manner as to severely injure his foot. A running sore appeared on his ankle and pieces of bone came out. His mother procured from a fairy woman a "bottle of herbs," which was rubbed upon the foot and

*Pronounced *lus-more*; literally the "great herb."

resulted in a cure. The bottle was paid for with a basket of eggs, each one of which was marked with a black cross made with the burned end of a stick, probably of furze. The woman explained that he had been kicked by the fairies, who were passing that way when he jumped into their midst. This woman went every night with the fairies, who summoned her with a peculiar whistle, which was heard by other persons as well as herself. She was once called away from a wake in this manner, but no one had the courage to follow her. The story is given as told by the man who made the leap, an old soldier who has spent the last thirty years fighting Indians and border outlaws on the frontier, and is now laid up for repairs at the soldiers' home near Washington. When a boy he often watched all day at the entrance to a fairy fort to catch a glimpse of the fairy shoemaker, but he says he no longer believes in such things.

Another of these women kept a bottle of water, and by holding it up to the light could tell whether or not a sick person would recover. A man once came to her to inquire about his brother, who was sick. She looked at the bottle of water and said, "You have come three minutes too late." The man went home and his brother died.

When any one sneezes, it is in consequence of a blast from the fairies, who are then endeavoring to carry him off. At the third sneeze they will accomplish their object, and leave a corpse or an invalid changeling in his place, unless some one present exclaims, "God bless us!" On hearing the name of God the fairies take flight, and it is hardly too much to say that this ejaculation is never omitted on such occasions. A similar custom prevails throughout Europe and has been traced back as far at least as the time of Homer.

The prehistoric stone arrow head, or *saige'ad** occasionally found in the country, is a fairy dart which has been shot at some man or animal, and thus lost. The fortunate finder can counteract the designs of the fairies, and the old woman who possesses one is regarded with much veneration, and in the expressive language of the people, "she will get good nursing." When an illness is supposed to be due to the influence of the fairies, the *saig'ead* is put into a tumbler and covered with water, which the patient then drinks, and if the fairies are responsible for his sickness he at once recovers. The *saig'ead* is preserved in some iron receptacle to prevent the fairies stealing it.

As so many physical evils are due to the fairies, it is natural that some means should be used to ward off their influence. For this purpose a horse shoe is nailed over the door, while garlic is planted in the thatch above it. As newly made brides and young mothers are in most danger from this source, a great many measures—which come more properly under the head of marriage customs—are taken to prevent the abduction of either the wife or the child. It may be in order here to state that no fire must be taken out of a house while a woman is sick within it, and

* Pronounced *sieth*, equivalent to the Latin *sagitta*.

there is a general reluctance to lending anything whatever out of the house at such times. The ancient religion of Ireland was fire worship, and numerous vestiges of the old belief still exist among the popular customs.

Scraps of iron are frequently carried as a protection against the fairies, and in Connamara it is still a common practice to wear about the person what is exactly equivalent to the medicine-bag of the Indian. The contents of this bag, which is about the size of a hickory nut, are known only to the owner, who conceals also the fact of its possession even from his most intimate friend, but among them are usually found tobacco, garlic, salt, chicken dung, *lus-crea*, and some dust from the roadside. This is worn also as a protection against the evil eye, and something of the same nature is sewed into the clothing of the bride when her friends are preparing her for the marriage ceremony.

Convulsions in a child are sometimes due to the influence of the fairies, being probably the result of its struggles to escape from their grasp. The theory and practice are best illustrated by relating an instance, which is given just as it was told by the narrator, who knew the mother and believed the story. A woman had a child which was subject to dangerous convulsions, and after one unusually violent attack she consulted a fairy woman, who told her what she must do. On her way home the mother picked up from the roadside ten small white pebbles known as fairy stones. On reaching home she put nine of these into a vessel of urine and threw the tenth into the fire. She also put into the vessel some chicken dung and three sprigs of a plant (probably garlic or ivy) which grew on the roof above the door. She then stripped the child and threw into the fire its shirt and the other garments which were worn next the skin. The child was then washed from head to foot in the liquid, wrapped in a blanket and put to bed. There were nine hens and a rooster on the rafters over the door. In a short time the child had a violent fit and the nine hens dropped dead upon the floor. The rooster jumped down from his perch, crew three times, and then flew up again to the rafters. If the woman had put the tenth stone with the others, he would have dropped dead with the hens. The child was cured.

Vicarious Cures.

This single instance combines in itself a number of important features in connection with the popular mythology—the dung, the urine, the plant over the door, the chicken, the fire and the garment worn next the skin—and introduces also a new element in the popular theory of disease, viz.: the idea of vicarious cure, or rather, of vicarious sacrifice. This belief, which is general, is that no one can be cured of a dangerous illness unless, as the people express it, "something is left in his place," to suffer the sickness and death. A few illustrations from the County Clare will exemplify this belief.

A father, whose son was nearly at the point of death, applied to a man noted for his healing powers, who told him that the boy could be saved but that something must go in his place. "Well," said the father, "take anything that I have but a Christian." The other said it would not do for him to accept anything, but that he would put his own horse in the place of the boy. He then told the father to watch the horse, which was just coming up from the sea with a load of sand. The moment the cart reached the spot where the sand was to be put, the horse dropped dead. When the man arrived at home his son was well.

In another instance a woman was sick, and her husband called in a man who told him to take every living thing out of the house before he proceeded to cure her. The husband put his children out of the house, but forgot "a sow with a litter of *bonnivs*"* in one corner. The other man then recited certain prayers and restored the woman to health, but when the family came back again into the house they found the sow and the *bonnivs* dead.

At another time a man's wife was sick and the operator was sent for. He recited some words and the woman began to recover, but the next morning a fine cow belonging to her husband was found lying in the field, groaning and unable to rise. The cow grew worse as the woman grew better, and when the cow died the woman was well.

In the same connection may be mentioned a custom which prevails among the fishermen of Mayo and Connamara. Every master of a fishing boat carries a dog with him when out at sea, and should a storm arise, the dog's legs are tied together and it is thrown overboard, in the belief that the sea will at once become calm. This practice exists in Ireland to-day, in the nineteenth century, and is exactly what formerly existed among the Indians on the great lakes, as we learn from the trader, Alexander Henry. In 1766, while crossing Lake Huron in a canoe with a party of Ojibwas, a storm came up, which was attributed by the Indians to the anger of the snake god, whom he had offended the day before by attempting to kill a rattlesnake. After calling on the snake god for help, "One of the chiefs took a dog, and after tying its four legs together threw it overboard, at the same time calling on the snake to preserve us from being drowned, and desiring him to satisfy his hunger with the carcass of the dog."† We read in the Bible how, nearly three thousand years ago, the prophet Jonah, fleeing from the will of God, was on board a ship in the Mediterranean when they were overtaken by a storm. After calling upon their several gods, and using every effort to right the vessel, the sailors cast lots to discover who was responsible for the storm, and the lot fell upon the prophet. "Then said they unto him, What shall we do unto thee, that the sea may be calm unto us? for the sea wrought and was tempestuous. And he said unto them, Take me up and cast me forth into the sea; so

* Gaelic, *banab*, a sucking pig.

† Henry, Travels, 178, 1809.

shall the sea be calm unto you, for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you. * * * So they took up Jonah and cast him forth into the sea, and the sea ceased from her raging" (Jonah, i: 11, 12, 15).

Another belief, which exists alike in Ireland and among the Indians, is that certain localities are the abode of invisible malignant spirits, which visit sickness and death upon those who come within their reach. These evil spirits are overhead in the air, and are quite a different order of beings from the fairies, who live upon or under the ground, and on the whole are rather regarded as benevolent. If sickness or death occurs in a new house, it is frequently ascribed to this cause, and the house will be removed, or torn down and rebuilt in another place.

There is also a way by which the pains of maternity can be transferred from the woman to her husband. This secret is so jealously guarded that a correspondent in the west of Ireland, who had been asked to investigate the matter, was at last obliged to report: "In regard to putting the sickness on the father of a child, that is a well-known thing in this country, but after making every inquiry I could not make out how it is done. It is strictly private." It came out, however, in a chance conversation with a woman who, when a child, had once been selected to wait upon a nurse on such an occasion. At a critical moment the nurse "hunted her out of the room," and then, taking the husband's vest, she put it upon the sick woman. The child had hid behind the door in the next room and saw the whole operation, but was too far off to hear the words which were probably repeated at the same time. It is asserted by some that the husband's consent must first be obtained, but the general opinion is that he feels all the pain, and even cries out with the agony, without being aware of the cause.

The Evil Eye.

The belief in the existence of the *evil eye* is general throughout Ireland as well as throughout the greater portion of Europe and Asia. It was held also by the ancients, among whom there were whole nations whose glances were supposed to be fatal, and it was even thought that there was death in the sound of their voices. The eastern nations, both Christian and Mohammedan, ascribe almost every unaccountable illness to this cause; and among the Turks sentences from the Koran are written upon the walls of the houses to counteract it, while glass balls are hung from the ceiling, and gaudy trappings put upon the horses, to divert from the owner the attention of the evil-minded beholder. So general is this belief that a writer upon the subject says: "It is not improbable that if the matter were still more profoundly investigated, it would be found that every nation that exists, or has existed, with anything like a developed system of superstition, believes or has believed in the reality of fascination in some form or other."* There seems to be nothing exactly similar among the Indians, at least among the Siouan tribes of the plains,

* Am. Cy., iv, 177, 1880.

although the belief is said to exist among some Californian tribes. It may be that the idea is too subtle and intangible for the mind of a savage.

The general prevalence of this belief would seem to indicate that there must be some good reason for its existence, and this reason is doubtless to be found in the wonderful properties of the eye itself. We all know how much of attraction, repulsion, love or hate, may be expressed by a glance, and how intensified is this power of expression in certain individuals. There is unquestionably some innate, inexplicable power in the human eye, although more apparent in some persons than in others, and we can readily understand how the people of Ireland believe that every individual possesses this faculty at some period in his existence, and that it is sometimes hereditary, like other physical and mental characteristics. The influence of the human eye over the inferior animals is well known, and much has been written concerning the fascinating powers of the serpent, although in the latter case modern biology has shown that the result is due not so much to the eye of the serpent as to the paralyzing effect of fear upon his victim.

Droc'-s'uil, the "bad eye,"* is the name given to the evil eye in the Gaelic-speaking districts of Ireland, while it is known as the *bad eye* in the east, and the *ill eye* in the north. The act of fascination is called *deanad' droc'-s'uil*†, "making a bad eye," or *overlooking*. Those who possess this blighting power are generally unaware of its presence in themselves, and the evil consequences of its influence are not usually the result of any malevolent desire upon their part. The evil eye, either in man or woman, is generally due to some omission or irregularity in the ceremony of baptism. Should any word of the prescribed formula be forgotten, or should the sponsor fail to give the surname of the child as well as the name about to be conferred upon it, the infant will, in spite of itself, come into possession of this dreaded power. The idea underlying this belief may be that, as the child is born in a state of original sin, it is under the influence of the evil spirit until sanctified by baptism, and that if the ceremony be improperly performed, a part of this influence still remains and manifests itself in the evil eye. In some instances the *droc'-s'uil* is hereditary, and there are even cases where it exists among all the relatives of the same surname. A notable example of this occurs in the western part of the County Clare, where all the members of a family named Mearnan are known to possess an evil eye, even to the remote degrees of kinship. Notwithstanding this, they are much esteemed for their upright character, as it is well understood that this mysterious power is not subject to their own control. This family is referred to, but not named, in Hall's Ireland (III, page 250), a book published about forty years ago. The stories given further on concerning the Mearnans were obtained, with others, from natives of the County Clare, who were well

*Pronounced, *dhrūkh-uil*.

†Pronounced, *jeenoo dhrūkh-uil*.

acquainted with the family. While the evil eye belongs to some persons in a special manner, every man, woman and child possesses this faculty unawares once in every twenty-four hours, and a single glance at such a time is followed by all the ordinary disastrous consequences. This explains many mysterious cases of sickness otherwise unaccountable.

As has been shown, sickness and death sometimes result from the unconscious glance of one possessed of the evil eye, without any desire upon his part to injure the victim. Should a person, however, known to possess an evil eye, speak admiringly of another, praising his good looks, his healthful color, or his robust physique, or speak in a similar manner of his child, his cow, his crops, or anything belonging to him, it is inferred that he intends evil toward the person or thing thus spoken of, and measures are at once taken to prevent it. In many cases the evil-minded person is compelled by the injured man, on pain of bodily damage, to spit upon the object of his pretended admiration, and at the same time to invoke a blessing upon it. In Connamara a bowl is sometimes sent around the neighborhood, and each person to whom it is presented is expected to spit into it. The bowl is then taken home, and the person or animal overlooked is anointed with the spittle. The object of this is to obtain the spittle of the person responsible for the injury without giving him offense or awaking his suspicion, as a direct appeal to him would be certain to do. When the spittle cannot be procured, the same result is accomplished by burning near the afflicted person a piece taken from the clothing of the one who has overlooked him.

Should any one accidentally meet a person suspected of an evil eye, its influence may be averted by doubling the thumbs under the fingers. This gesture, and the measures just mentioned, are used throughout a great part of Europe for the same purpose. It has been asserted that the closed hand is used from its fancied resemblance in shape to the initial letter of the Hebrew name for God; but while the name of the Hebrew letter also signifies a *hand*, the equivalent Phœnician and Egyptian hieroglyph is an open, instead of a closed hand. It seems also to be of different origin from the ancient Italian gesture still used to avert the evil eye, which is made by extending the first and fourth fingers, and is supposed to have had reference originally to a pair of horns. The true reason for using the closed hand probably lies in the fact that in this position the thumb and finger form a cross. In all Catholic countries it is a common practice to make the sign of the cross as a protection against dangers, especially those which are due to the influence of evil spirits. This sign is usually made upon the forehead, while occasionally the second finger is simply crossed over the first, but the method of the closed hand would naturally be adopted in this case to avoid attracting attention, just as an entire neighborhood is sometimes laid under contribution for spittle in order to avoid giving offense to the suspected party.

When an illness is thought to be due to the influence of the evil eye, the *bean feasac* who makes a specialty of such cases is called in to deter-

mine the matter, and to point out the author of the trouble, but her office seems to go no further, as the mode of cure is generally understood.

Anything which renders an individual conspicuous is liable to attract the attention of the evil eye—a belief also held by the Turks—and this explains some Irish blessings which are intended and regarded as curses. A common one of this kind is, *Go mbeid' ba b'ána do c'uid ba, go mbeid' teac' air an airde do t'eac', agus go mbeid' bean b'reag' do b'ean.** "May your portion of cows be white cows, may your house be a house upon the height, and may your wife be a fine woman." Here the real wish of the speaker is that the conspicuous color of the cattle, the prominent position of the house upon a hill, and the pleasing qualities of the wife, may attract the attention of the evil eye to the possessor.

A few of the stories related of the Mearnans will illustrate the various phases of this belief. They are given substantially as told by the narrators. Two parties of men were one day at work in the field putting up the hay into reeks, and one party was getting ahead of the other. A man of the slower party called the attention of a comrade named Mearnan to this fact. "Never mind," said Mearnan, "just wait." The others had their reek finished first and were just putting the top on it, when the whole pile fell over, burying the men under it, and Mearnan's party came out ahead.

Another one of the same family stopped one day to admire a fine mare. As he started to go, a neighbor suggested to the owner that Mearnan ought to bless the mare. Much against his will he was compelled to come back, bless the animal and spit upon it. Soon after the mare had two foals, which were both dead, and if he had not blessed the mother she would have died likewise. The same man was one day passing along the road when he stopped to admire a horse in an adjoining field. The next day the animal, in attempting to jump across a ditch, fell into it and could not rise again. The owner and several of the neighbors tried for some time to get the animal upon its feet, without success, until at last one of the men remarked to the owner, "Micky, didn't Mearnan say yesterday that was a fine horse?" "He did," says Micky. "Well, then, you send for him and make him spit on it." So Mearnan was sent for, and whether he liked it or not he had to come. As soon as he laid his hand upon the horse the animal neighed. He said, "God bless you," and spit upon it, and the horse at once climbed up out of the ditch. The owner's wife, who was looking on, said to her husband, "Faith, Micky, if spitting ever got a horse out of the ditch, and it did yours to-day."

A woman of this name caused an accident to her little boy, just learning to walk, on three several occasions, by calling attention to his agility in climbing up on the table or the dresser. Each time he fell down from his elevated position and broke his leg. When this happened the third

* Pronounced, *Gŭ mŏ bawh wawna dhŏ khuj bawh, gŭ mŏ chŏkh er an awrja dhŏ hŏkh, ŏgus gŭ mŏ ban vraw dhŏ van.*

time her brother, who well knew the reason of it, told her that it was her fault, in not having blessed the child when she spoke of it. The mother would not believe it, and insisted as strongly that the brother was responsible for the accident. When the boy grew up he was obliged to wear trousers instead of knee breeches to conceal the deformity caused in this manner. This woman one day met a young man going to church, and carrying his shoes in his hand, as the road was muddy. She made some complimentary remark about his feet, and when the young man got home from church they were turned inward, and he was unable to stand upon them. The woman was sent for and compelled, very unwillingly, to bless his feet and spit upon them, but as she was going out of the door she turned round and said, "May it never thrive with you." The young man recovered the use of his feet, but there was always a twist in them afterward. In this climate a tramp of several miles barefoot over a muddy road, together with kneeling or standing for two hours in a cramped position on the cold floor of a church, might have resulted in rheumatism.

One of the Mearnans was so well aware of this blighting influence in himself, that on entering a house to pay a visit he would always spit upon and bless each member of the family before sitting down.

A number of men, including two carters with their horses, were one day at work in the County Cavan, when one of the party happened to say something in praise of the animals. On quitting work for the day the horses were found to be sick, and soon lay down and were unable to rise. Several remedies were tried without avail, until some one told the owner of one of the horses that the man who had praised them in the morning had an evil eye, and advised him to get him to spit upon them. He said he could not do that, as that man had a grudge against him. His friend then told him to get a piece of the man's clothing and burn it near the horses. That night the carter secretly cut a piece from the coat of the man who was responsible for the trouble, and going out to the horses he set fire to the rag and held it first near the head of his own animal and then near the other. In the morning his horse was well and the one belonging to the other carter was dead. The virtue was gone from the cloth before it reached the second horse. As the one who related the incident said, it was, "Man, save yourself." In this instance the knife used belonged also to the owner of the coat, but this had no effect upon the result.

The Blessed Wells.

In addition to the practitioners of various kinds, the people have great recourse to the numerous "blessed wells" throughout the country. The religious veneration for healing wells is older than history, and is found, not only in Ireland, but throughout Europe and Southern Asia. It is frequently referred to in the Bible, the most notable instance being that of the pool of Bethesda. There seems to be nothing of the kind among our Indians, who, although they regard certain localities with peculiar rever-

ence as the abodes of invisible manitos, to whom they never fail to make some offering in passing, yet apparently do not attach any healing powers to such places.

There are hundreds of these wells in Ireland, at least twenty being in the County Galway alone. They are generally dedicated to some saint, and there is always a legend to account for their origin. Thus Columcille's well, at Kells, in the County Meath, sprang up from the floor of the saint's house while his mother was lying on a sick bed, thirsting for a drink. In many, and perhaps in most cases, ancient Druidic remains or round towers are found near them, showing that these have been places of religious resort even before the dawn of Christianity. Should one of these wells be defiled, it would at once cease to flow, and the perpetrator of the sacrilege would wither away under the curse of the patron saint of the spring. The water must not be used for ordinary purposes. Incidents are related of women, who, being in haste to prepare a meal, have taken water from a blessed well close at hand rather than go to another spring at a distance, but found, after exhausting their patience in fruitless efforts, that it was impossible to bring the water to a boil. This is perfectly true, as the strong mineral impregnations which give the water its medicinal virtues, render it extremely difficult to boil under ordinary circumstances. There is usually a fish, a worm, or a peculiar stone at the bottom of the well, and the circumstances attending its appearance are regarded as omens of success or failure in obtaining relief. On departing from the well, pilgrims leave behind some small token of their visit, generally a shred torn from the clothing, which is twisted into the ivy that clambers up the rock, or hung from the limb of a tree overshadowing the water. These trees may be distinguished afar off by the number of rags suspended from their branches and fluttering in the breeze. This is an ancient custom, and is still practiced in Southern Asia as far east as Ceylon, and throughout Northern Africa, and along the east coast as far south as Zanzibar. Cripples who have recovered the use of their limbs leave also the crutches and litters used in coming. Besides the wells, there are many small lakes and waterfalls which are visited for the same purpose. Many of these wells have been deserted since the great famine of 1847-8.

While religious exercises are a prominent feature at all these resorts, there are some which are visited principally from motives of devotion. Chief among these is the celebrated Lough Dearg, in Donegal, which was resorted to by pilgrims from all parts of Europe during the Middle Ages, and where the rigid discipline imposed upon the penitents in its subterranean caves is said to have served as the model for Dante's Purgatorio. The wells are resorted to for almost every variety of ailment, but there are some which are especially noted for the cure of particular diseases, such as ulcers, sore eyes, or rheumatic affections. The pilgrims frequently come from long distances, sometimes even walking a hundred miles. The exercise, which is known as "making the stations" or "going a round,"

is sometimes performed by proxy, or by the invalid after recovery in accordance with a vow made during his illness. In the latter case, he is generally accompanied by a friend, who goes through the same exercises. The sanitary part consists of immersion, shower baths—where the water falls over a rock—rubbing and drinking the water. The operation is generally repeated on three, sometimes on seven or nine consecutive mornings, while the patient is still fasting. The religious part consists of the repetition of a number of prayers, usually the Our Father and Hail Mary, or the two combined in the rosary. While reciting these prayers the patient walks or is led around the well a certain number of times, always following the course of the sun. The circuit is frequently made upon the knees, and in every case the pilgrimage is undertaken and carried out in a spirit of deep religious fervor.

The wells are visited at all seasons of the year, but the favorite time is the day consecrated to the patron saint of the well. In some cases a remarkable phenomenon takes place at a certain hour, and is awaited by the people as the signal for entering the water. Thus St. John's well, a noted well at Kilcarty, in the County Meath, is visited on St. John's eve—June 23, or midsummer eve, the great fire festival of ancient and modern Ireland. Just at midnight a mist rises from the surface of the water, on seeing which those in waiting begin the circuit around the well. A similar phenomenon is related of Lough Ee-Cinlaan, a small "blessed lough" near Kenmare, in the County Kerry, which is also visited on St. John's eve and the following day. At a certain hour three "tussocks" of floating grass in the middle of the lough begin to move around in a circle, upon which the people waiting on the bank go down into the water. Compare this with the Bible account of the pool of Bethesda, which was surrounded by five porches. "In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the water. Whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in, was made whole of whatsoever disease he had."* In each case the remarkable appearance is doubtless owing to the same causes which govern the periodic movements of geysers and other intermittent springs.

In the lough just mentioned, one of the three tussocks always moves around in the rear of the other two, which, like everything else in Ireland, is accounted for by a legend. They formerly moved along abreast, until one day a sacrilegious wretch attempted to mow the grass for his own use. The moment he struck his scythe into the first tussock, blood followed, as from a living thing, and dyed the waters of the lake. Terrified at the sight, he desisted from his purpose, but ever since the wounded tussock has limped behind its fellows.

A brief extract from a recent Irish letter, written in reply to some questions concerning the blessed wells of the County Galway, will give a

* John v: 3, 4.

better idea of the present beliefs and practices in this connection than many pages o description. The writer is one of the people, and has been familiar all his life with the customs which he describes so accurately. The extract is given in his own words, with the exception of a few slight grammatic changes. The letter is written from Curnamona, near Clonbur, about twenty miles north-west from the town of Galway:

"Thubber Muira and Feheen, in Ballintubber. Noted to cure any kind of sickness that may occur in a family. Station days are the eve of any of the Lady Days—eighth of September, fifteenth of August and second of February. The stations are performed thus:

"The person will kneel before the wells barefooted, will say so many prayers, and will take in his right hand seven pebbles, of stones which are for the purpose at the mouths of the wells. After walking around the well he will drop a pebble at each round, will kneel again and say more prayers, and so on until finished. There is one remarkable thing about these wells. After promising a station at these wells, if a person goes and prays there, he will see a small worm; and if the worm lives (*i. e.*, is alive) the patient will recover, and if seen dead the patient will die. After performing a station here, if it be a male person he will drop a button in the well, sometimes a piece of coin, etc.; and if it be a female, she will pull some threads out of her shawl or some part of her clothes, which she ties on the bush that covers these wells. Persons abroad promise stations at these wells and get some of their friends on this side to perform them, which must be done by two persons together."

In this instance there are two wells at the same locality. The name of the principal one, Thubber Muira,* or "Mary's well," shows that it is dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and consequently the favorite times for visiting it are the "Lady Days," or days specially devoted to her honor. These are named in the order of their importance, which is the reverse of the chronologic order. Feheen† is the name of a saint of local celebrity, and is sometimes rendered by Festus. It is to be noted that the name of the place, Ballintubber,‡ signifies the "town of the well," showing that the village owes its name, and perhaps also its origin in the remote past, to the presence of the spring in its vicinity. The water is probably used as previously stated, according to the nature of the complaint.

A second extract from the same letter furnishes an excellent illustration of some of the beliefs connected with these wells, aside from their healing powers. After describing Thubber Enue, or Eneas' well, which springs out of a rock in the hill of Doon, in the same region, and is especially noted for the cure of sore eyes, the writer goes on to say, "There was another remarkable affair about this well—a kind of a round stone, called

* Gaelic, *Tobar Muire.* The three wells and the *leac* described in this letter are also noticed in Wilde's Lough Corrib, already referred to, pages 267–9.

† Gaelic, *Fec'in.*

‡ Gaelic, *Baile'n-Tobair.*

*Lyoc Enue.** Prayers were offered and this *lyoc* turned over. For instance, if one person belied another, or gave scandal by any means, then the person would go and offer those prayers and turn the *lyoc*, and whosoever of them would be in the fault, he was sure to die; but whatever time of the year this would occur, it was sure to be followed by bad weather, thunder and rain. So the farming class was almost ruined by this work, and the people practicing it more and more, until at last the clergy got the *lyoc* taken away and thrown into the deepest spot of Lough Corrib—and more was the pity, for the people were not so often at that time going to petty sessions as they do now; they were leaving it all to God and *Lyoc Enue.*"

In another letter, dated January 20, 1887, the same writer thus mentions a noted waterfall in the same neighborhood: "There is a waterfall convenient to this place that cures pains of the back. The patient goes in his or her nakedness, for about ten minutes, under this waterfall, and the third time is sure of being all right. The only thing given down for this is, that a priest in the time of *Shawn-na-Soggarth*† was concealed for twenty-four hours under this waterfall." Whatever may be thought of the theory in this instance, it is plain that the treatment is exactly that adopted by the best surgeons in dealing with sprains and similar ailments, including "pains of the back," viz., subjecting the affected part to the action of a stream of cold water falling from a considerable elevation.

The pool of Bethesda at Jerusalem has already been noticed in this connection, and a comparison of the present Irish beliefs and customs in this regard with the Bible story of Naaman will show that they are substantially those which existed among the Jews nearly three thousand years ago. Naaman was a Syrian general, living at Damascus. He was afflicted with leprosy, and at last, by the advice of his friends, undertook a long journey to Samaria to procure the help of the prophet Elisha. When he had reached the latter city, "Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee and thou shalt be clean. * * * Then went he down and dipped himself seven times in Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again, like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean."‡ In this case the Syrian practice seems to have been different from that of the Jews, as Naaman had expected that the prophet would cure him by simply touching the diseased part and invoking the name of his God.

There can be no doubt that these "blessed wells" of Ireland are mineral springs of great medicinal virtues, as the whole country is a mineral region, containing coal and iron in abundance, with limestone cliffs along

*Gaelic, *Leac Aonʻus* "Eneas rock, or slab."

†Gaelic, *Seaġʻan na Sagart*, "John of the Priests;" the name given by the people to a "priest hunter" during the time of the penal laws.

‡2d Kings v: 10, 14.

the western coast, while the alluvial soil is deposited upon a stratum of turf or peat, which crops out at intervals in the numerous bogs. We should thus expect to find in these wells the same constituents that give a reputation to the mineral springs of the mountain region of Virginia and Pennsylvania. According to Dr. John Rutty, the author of two valuable works* on the mineral springs of Ireland and of Europe in general, some of the Irish wells commonly resorted to by the people are equal to any of the celebrated continental spas, while those noted for the cure of particular diseases contain just the constituents most beneficial in such cases. The ordinary impregnations are combinations of iron, lime, soda, magnesia and sulphur. In addition to these, many wells and streams are impregnated with petroleum and bituminous compounds, owing to their vicinity to the bogs, which contain large quantities of half-fossilized pines and other resinous conifers. It is a well-known fact that bog water has preservative qualities, and bodies of persons drowned in these bogs have been recovered long afterward still undecayed. There are also some streams and lakes, notably Lough Neagh, whose waters have petrifying properties. Were Ireland free to develop her own resources, not only would her neglected mines and marble quarries be made available, but her healing springs, now visited only by barefooted peasants, would speedily acquire a reputation, which, together with the natural beauties of the country, would attract thousands of those who yearly seek health or pleasure on the continent. There is nothing but simple truth in the proud boast of the people of Ireland that in their native country the grass is always green, the soil harbors no venomous reptile, and the waters are blessed.

Miscellaneous Charms.

Besides the blessed wells and the *sig·efreog*, the people have a number of charms for various diseases—in fact, it is probably safe to say that they have a charm for every malady, real or imaginary, that ever existed. Many of these charms are accompanied by verses or other formulas, which have been handed down for generations, and there is generally a legend to explain the formula. A few of these charms are here given. It must be stated at the outset that the application is always made in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Should any one become sick in church while wearing a garment sewn on Sunday, it will be impossible to cure him.

Epilepsy is called *tinneas mor*,† the "great sickness," and is regarded with such dread that it is seldom mentioned except under some figurative name. The patient is cured by drinking milk boiled in a human skull. An "essence" prepared from a human skull was formerly used in Italy to cure the same disease, according to a medical work published in that

* A Methodical Synopsis of Mineral Waters, &c., and Essay Towards a Natural, Experimental and Medicinal History of the Mineral Waters of Ireland.

† Pronounced *chinyas moer*.

country in 1726, and the skull of one who had died a violent death was preferred, being considered to retain more of the vital principle.

Toothache is cured by rubbing the gum with the finger of a corpse, or washing it with some of the water used in washing the corpse when preparing it for burial. The cure is permanent. The pain is commonly supposed to be caused by a small worm eating the tooth, and this worm is sometimes killed by applying to the tooth a piece of tobacco, guano, or some other pungent substance. The Omaha Indians, who hold the same theory, kill the worm by blistering the skin on the outer surface of the jaw. The dead hand holds an important place in Irish mythology.

Headache is called *fiab'ras beag*,* or "little fever," and is caused by the joints of the skull springing apart until "the head is open"—just as we sometimes hear a man under such circumstances say that his head is splitting. The woman who has the cure takes a woolen string, with which she measures the head of the sufferer in three different directions, in order to see how far it is open. First the string is put under the chin, and the ends are brought up over the top of the head. Next it is measured in the same way from under the nose to the back of the head, bringing the ends of the string across just above the ears, and finally the string is drawn around the forehead and over the temples to the back of the head. Having learned how much the head has opened, she presses it firmly between her hands to bring the sutures together, says certain words, and the cure is effected. In one instance the patient was told that his head had opened something more than an inch. There may be more virtue in this method than is at first apparent.

Earache is cured by putting into the ear a piece of wool from a black sheep, saturated with oil, at the same time reciting the appropriate words. The last remark holds good also of this cure.

Sore throat is cured by putting the head of a live gander into the mouth of the patient and making it scream down his throat. The *thrush* in children is cured in a similar way, by getting a posthumous child to blow into the mouth of the sufferer. The blowing must be done by the operator while still fasting, and is generally repeated for three successive mornings.

Some persons can "set a charm" to *staunch a wound* so that not a drop of blood shall flow from it. The charm is said to consist solely in the repetition of certain words, without any application whatever. A hemorrhage can be stopped instantly by the application of a garment, which has been washed or ironed on Sunday.

There are several cures for a *sprain*. The most common method is to tie around the joint a *fogee*, or worn-out thread from a loom. Sometimes a string is used which has been held in the mouth while a certain charm is recited. The most remarkable method is used in Kerry, both for men

* Pronounced *fevearas b'yug*.

and animals, and is here given without comment, as described by a man who saw the operation performed at his own house for the cure of a lame horse, which recovered before morning. There is a thorny shrub, known in that county as *sgeac'-m'adera*,* or "dog briar," whose white flowers are fixed close to the stem, while its thorns point downward. As our Savior, when a child, was one day walking with His mother, they met this briar and admired its flowers. The Mother tried to pluck one of them, but could not reach it until the briar bent down to her grasp. Since then its thorns always bend downward. To perform the cure a rod about three feet long is cut from the *sgeac'-m'adera* and split down the middle. Two men then stand close together, facing each other, each one holding against his body, at the right and left side, one end of the two pieces thus made, while his companion holds the other two ends in the same manner. In a short time the two rods begin to bend in toward the centre and gradually approach each other until they are firmly united for about six inches of their length in the middle. The man who sets the charm—a third party—then cuts off this portion and lays it upon the sprained joint, repeating certain words at the same time. The rest of the stick is thrown away. This charm never fails, excepting when there is a stain upon the birth of one of those holding the rods.

Scrofula, or the *evil*, is sometimes cured by applying a little powder from a deer's horn, which is kept in houses for this purpose. Another common method is to apply the blood of nine or twelve young wrens. The number must be decided by the ornithologist, as they take the whole brood, which, according to some persons, always consists of twelve birds, while others say there are only nine. This blood is called *fuil rig'e*† or "king's blood," for the wren is the king of birds in Ireland as in Germany. There may be some connection between king's blood and king's evil. The water of St. John's well, already referred to, is also noted for curing this disease.

The cure for *sore eyes* due to the presence of some foreign body, is best described by an incident, given as related by the man who was cured by the operation. While gathering seaweed on the strand he got something in his eye, and sent instructions to a *bean feasac'* living six miles away to take it out. She put some clean water in a glass, took it in her mouth, repeated a charm known as *aroid a b'raoinin*,‡ the "charm of the little drop," and then squirted the water back into the glass. The obstruction was seen floating on top of the water, and the woman took it out and threw it away. At the same instant the man working on the seashore experienced relief. This reminds one forcibly of the orthodox Indian medicine man.

A man who found a cataract growing over his eye walked on three suc-

* Pronounced in Kerry *shŷ'yŏkh-wŏdhera*.

† Pronounced *fwil rec*.

‡ Pronounced, *ŏroj a wreeneen*.

cessive mornings before breakfast to the house of the woman who cured it, which she did by making the sign of the cross upon his eye with her finger three times on each occasion, repeating a charm at the same time. If a bramble, or the finger, should accidentally strike the eye, the pain is at once relieved by making the sign of the cross in the same way three times with the object which caused the injury.

There are several cures for *rheumatism*. One, which has its parallel in this country, is to carry a potato in the pocket, and as the potato dries up the patient will recover. Another way is for the patient to lie upon his breast, and let a man who came into the world feet foremost walk along his body from the feet to the head. In one instance, where a man was completely crippled by rheumatism in his knee, he was advised by a woman to make a poultice of raw potatoes sliced very thin, and bind it upon his knee, and keep it there without change until the potatoes became offensive from decay. He did as directed, and after wearing the poultice for several weeks until he could endure the smell no longer, he found himself recovering. The potato is believed to have great medicinal virtue, as is also the water in which potatoes have been boiled.

A man who suffered from *colic* applied to another who had a cure for it, and was given a small piece of unsalted butter, with instructions to take a little of it for three consecutive mornings, while still fasting, reciting certain prayers at the same time. He could not say positively what those prayers were, "for fear of telling a lie." The doctor was not allowed to take pay for his cure, but might accept a free gift. The man did as directed, and was permanently cured, nor did the butter ever melt or become less, although he kept it until he was coming to America. Another man on the vessel was troubled in the same way. He lent him the butter, and it cured him, but on looking for it the next morning it had disappeared. Unsalted butter is used in a great many charms, and may not be such a bad thing after all.

The following charm for *tumors* and similar swellings comes from Meath. The patient, a child who was afflicted with an unnatural swelling just above the upper lip, on three consecutive Friday afternoons walked several miles into Navan, so as to arrive at the house of the *bean feasac* just as the sun was setting in the west. Turning the child's face toward the setting sun, the woman bathed the swelling with a liquid from a glass which she held in her hand, repeating certain words at the same time. After the third Friday the swelling disappeared. This idea in connection with the setting sun is part of an old belief common to all Europe, which prompts farmers to plant crops with a growing moon, and leads fishermen to expect the end of a dying man when the tide is going out. It is impossible to learn the composition of the liquid.

Warts are cured in the same county by impaling a snail upon a hedge thorn. As the body of the snail shrivels up, the wart disappears. The

idea here is similar to that just mentioned. In Connamara for the same trouble ten joints (the knots only) are cut from an oat stalk, nine of which are tied up in a small parcel, while the tenth is thrown away. The parcel is left at the cross-roads, and the warts will go to the one who picks it up. The idea here is also common in European folk-lore, and almost the same method is used in Switzerland. The selection of ten similar objects, one of which is afterward thrown away, appears also in the account already given of the child cured of convulsions. It is also proper to mention here that oats are the sacred grain in Irish mythology.

Another method is, on rising in the morning, to spit upon the hearth while still fasting, and then rub the spittle upon the wart with the second finger. The first finger is never used for rubbing spittle or ointment upon sores of any kind, as it is supposed to have a poisonous effect. The operation is repeated every morning until the wart disappears.

Another method, used in Galway, is to bathe the wart with water found lying in a depression in the surface of a rock, saying at the same time:

"*Uisge cloc'a gan iarraid',*
Ni'g t'iarraid' tá me."*

"Water of a stone without seeking,
It's not seeking for you I am."

As the words of the formula imply, the water must be found accidentally, no benefit resulting from its application when a deliberate search is made for it.

In a case resembling *asthma*, where the patient, a boy about seven years old, felt a constant choking sensation and was rapidly losing flesh, he was taken by the old man who had the cure, and placed standing with his back against a tree growing in a field—the tree, in this instance, being an apple tree. A hole was then bored in the tree just above the child's head, a lock of his hair cut off and placed in it, and the opening closed up again. Although not mentioned by the informant, some words were undoubtedly repeated at the same time. As the boy grew above the hole in the tree, he grew away from the disease.

A well-known charm used in cases of *decline*, or incipient consumption, may be described by giving an instance, without comment, as related by an eye-witness. A young girl of lively disposition suddenly lost health and spirits, and appeared to be rapidly sinking into the grave, when her friends persuaded her to visit an old woman who offered to cure her. On arriving there the woman filled a tumbler with oatmeal, even with the top, and wrapped a thin cloth around it. Then loosening the girl's dress she applied the mouth of the tumbler first to her back, then to her side, and lastly to her bosom. On removing the cloth from the tumbler it was found that half the meal had disappeared. The glass was refilled and the

* Pronounced, *Ishga clăkha gum eerree,*
Nee gă cheerree thaw mae.

operation repeated, and on removing the cloth a part of the meal was gone, but not so much as the first time. Once more the tumbler was filled and applied as before, and this time, on removing the cloth, there was hardly a depression in the surface of the meal, and the woman pronounced the cure complete. The girl's friend, who had looked on with wonder, now asked what had become of the meal. The woman replied, "I gave that to the worms that were eating her heart." In some cases the three operations are repeated on as many consecutive days.

For *worms* an amulet is worn, which consists of a small piece of paper on which is written a charm. The *bean feasac'*, holding this paper in her hand, kneels down and recites a prayer, and the paper is then sewn into a covering of red woolen (flannel) cloth, of three-cornered shape, and worn about the neck.

Cramp is caused by worms, which twist themselves into a knot about the intestines. For this trouble, in men or animals, a string is tied with a peculiar triple knot, known as *snaid'm na peiste*,* or "the worm's knot," in such a manner that on pulling the ends of the string the knot is undone. The sufferer is struck on the stomach or back several times with the string, before and after knotting it, the name of the Trinity being invoked at each blow. In Kerry it is merely placed upon the stomach of the patient, and the ends pulled so as to undo the knot. Any one subject to cramps will be cured by making the sign of the cross three times on his stomach on seeing a rainbow.

For *convulsions* in children it is sometimes customary in the County Galway to use a preparation of charcoal made by burning and pulverizing the bones of an infant which has died before baptism.

Boils, however swollen and painful, may be cured by a blacksmith who is the seventh son of a blacksmith. It is only necessary that he shall open and shut his tongs three times in front of the boil, without touching it. The seventh son has generally great power over disease.

The *ringworm* is called *teine-d'iad'a*,† or the "divine fire," and is cured in a number of ways. Perhaps the most common method is to rub the inflamed spot three times with a ring or other article of gold, or with a live coal of fire, saying at the same time, *O'ugat || a teine, || a t'eine-d'iad'a.*‡ "Beware of the fire, *teine-d'iad'a*," the gold or coal of fire being applied as each of the principal words is being pronounced. The operation is repeated three times, making nine applications in all. Another method is to apply the blood of a black cat, and in some houses there are cats whose ears have been cut away by piecemeal for this purpose. Black and red (the color of fire) are the principal colors of Irish mythology. Another method is to write around the ringworm the full name of the sufferer,

* Pronounced *sneem na paeshcha.*

† Pronounced *chinnee-yea.*

‡ Pronounced *hūgath a chinnee, a hinnee-yea.*

while still another is to rub the spot with spittle upon the second finger for three successive mornings.

The *black tongue* in cattle is called *bolg-t'eanga*,* or "swelled tongue," and is sometimes cured by bleeding the animal in the tail, but more often by reciting the following charm, by means of which the Blessed Virgin, while one day walking with her Son, cured the cow of a poor widow, who was unable to give them a drink of milk on account of the illness of the animal:

"'N aroid a c'uir Muire go b'o C'ual-an-daire,
O feid' a druime go feid' a siorra;
Air b'uinn, air c'enn, air b'o-g'éimneac', air g'alra truad',
Agus air leig'eas na bolg-t'eanga." †

Cual-an-daire, which is evidently a compound word, is explained as the name of the village where the widow lived, while *buinn* and *cenn* appear to be the names of two cattle diseases. The Gaelic may be thus rendered:

"The charm which Mary put on the cow of Cual-an-dherra,
From the sinew of her back to the sinew of her pastern,
For *bûinn*, for *cenn*, for the groaning cow, for the wasting sickness,
And for a cure of the swelled tongue."

There is another contagious cattle disease, which generally attacks young animals of the best breeds, and is known in the Gaelic districts as *ceat'ram'a-d'ub'*,‡ the "black quarter," and elsewhere as black-leg or quarter-ail. It begins with a slight lameness in one of the quarters, which soon swells and becomes discolored, and in a very short time the animal dies, the instances of recovery being extremely rare. In Kerry, as soon as the animal is dead, the affected quarter is cut off and hung up in the chimney, in the belief that this will prevent the spread of the contagion. As the infection may be communicated to the other cattle by smelling the diseased part, and as there is always danger that the buried carcass may be rooted up by hogs or dogs, there seems to be something in this method to recommend it.

Any one who licks a lizard three times along the under side from the tail to the head can cure a *burn* by applying his tongue to the injured part three or nine times. This may have some connection with the old salamander theory. In Galway, on receiving an accidental burn, it is customary to ejaculate: *Lab'ras easbal agus Dia d'a f'reastail*,§ "Lawrence, the apostle (*sic*) and God to care for it." In Meath they exclaim, *Morra*

* Pronounced *bŭlag-honga*.

† Pronounced:
'Nŏroej a khûir Mûira gŏ woe Khual-an-dherra,
O fae a dhrûma gŏ fae a sherra,
Er win, er khen, er woe-yavnakh, er ghawlra thrua,
Ôgus er l'yice na bûlag-honga.

‡ Pronounced in Kerry *carhoo-ghoor*.

§ Pronounced *Lowaras asbal ŏgus jea ghaw rasthal*.

sneef, which is probably a corruption of *Maire 's naom't'a*,* "Most Holy Mary!"

When the *palate falls* it is raised by lifting the skin at a certain point at the back of the head. A similar method is used by the negroes.

Hooping cough is called *troc'*† by the Gaelic speakers, and *chin-cough* in the eastern districts, and there are a number of charms for it. One used in the south is to pass the sufferer three times over and under the body of a donkey, in the name of the Trinity. The same thing is done in Scotland. Sometimes a piece of bread or something of that kind is given to the donkey to eat, and the crumbs which he lets fall to the ground are put into broth for the patient. The most remarkable method is adopted in Galway, where the mother of the child goes to the owner of a white horse and asks:

"G'ioll' an eac' g'eal,
Cé rud a leig'eas air a troc'?‡

"Fellow of the white horse,
What thing is the cure for the whooping cough?"

He generally replies, "A cup of tea and a piece of bread," or something of the kind, and whatever he advises is given to the child in the confident hope of relieving it. The words used in asking this question are important, as showing the antiquity of the charm. The ordinary form for "white horse" is *capal bán*,§ while *eac'* is an obsolete word, and such an expression as *eac' geal* is found only in the ancient manuscripts and in poems and stories and similar compositions which have been handed down from a remote period.

The donkey is also in great repute for curing almost any contagious fever, as typhoid fever, etc. If the patient be a child, the donkey—a young one being preferred—is lifted three times over his head from front to back, after which the sick person drinks some of the milk of the dam. If the invalid be an adult, and sufficiently strong, he takes the animal by the fore and hind feet and lifts it over himself in the same manner. The donkey, or ass, is regarded as sacred, on account of being the animal upon which the Saviour once rode. The black cross upon his back, formed by the intersection of two lines of dark hair near the shoulders, is supposed to commemorate this event, and a young animal is preferred in these charms on account of the greater distinctness of the mark in the foal. It is considered lucky to have a donkey about the house, and many farmers who own horses, and have no need of donkeys, keep one in the field for this reason. A similar belief in regard to the sacredness of the donkey,

* Pronounced *Morra 'sneeva*; in the vocative the sound becomes *Worra*.

† Pronounced *thrŭkh*.

ronounced, *Yil' an yŏkh yal,*
Caer'dh a l'yice er a thrŭkh!

‡ Pronounced *cŏpal bawn*; *capal* is the Latin *caballus*, while *eac'* is equivalant to *equus*.

and its usefulness in the cure of certain diseases, especially whooping cough, prevails also in England and Scotland.

There is a disease, called *cleid'in** in Gaelic, which is difficult to characterize, but is described as a general break down or loss of strength, resulting from some sudden and violent over-exertion. In lifting heavy weights it sometimes happens that what is known in the eastern districts as the "spool of the heart"—probably the diaphragm from the description—is torn loose and drops down, so as to press upon the intestines. When this occurs the spool of the heart must be raised again, which is done in the following manner: A coin is stuck upon the lower end of a short piece of candle, which is then lighted and placed upright upon the bare breast of the patient, who, of course, is lying down. A tumbler is then inverted over the lighted candle, and in a few moments the skin over the inclosed surface is raised up into a blister and the sufferer finds relief. It is hardly necessary to state that this is simply a crude cupping process. This method is known throughout the country, but it is a disputed point whether the coin should be a copper ha'penny or a silver sixpence. The disease bears a different name in the south.

Erysipelas is called *ruaid'*,† which signifies something red, by the Gaelic speakers, while in the east it is known as *rose*, or *St. Anthony's fire*. It is generally cured by means of a charm used in connection with the *dearg-liac'*.‡ This is a grassy plant growing in the bogs, and having the lower part of its stems of a bright red color, by reason of the bog water with which they are always covered. The fact that it is sometimes used by laborers as a substitute for soap, shows that it possesses some peculiar properties. The operator—who should be a woman if the patient be a man, or a man if the contrary be the case—gathers a considerable quantity of this grass, holds it up in front of the mouth and breathes upon it, at the same time reciting a certain charm, after which it is bound tightly around the inflamed part. This must be done on the next Monday after the disease first appears, and is repeated "*d'a Luain agus Dia-d'ardaoin eadorra*,"§ that is, "two Mondays and Thursday between them," making three applications in all. The sufferer must endure the pain until Monday comes round, and it is also essential that the three applications be made under the same moon in which the illness is first noted, otherwise the trouble will be liable to recur every month afterward. Unsalted butter is sometimes used instead of the *dearg-liac'*, but is not considered so good, although the charm is recited in the same way. If a sick person should overhear his friends say that he has the *ruaid'*, he would at once be obliged to undergo the operation, no matter what might be the nature of

* Pronounced *clâ-cen*.

† Pronounced, *rua*, or *ruee*.

‡ Pronounced *jûrug-leeakh*; perhaps from *dearg*, "scarlet," and *liac'*, "gray," the *dearg* referring to the discoloration of the stems.

§ Pronounced *ghaw Luan ôgus Jaerdheen ădharra*.

his illness, under the certain penalty of taking the disease if he neglected the precaution. For this reason his relatives are careful not to "accuse" him of this disease unless the fact is beyond question. Stripped of all mythologic embellishments, there seems no reason to doubt the existence of some curative property in the *dearg-liac'*, as numerous instances are related of its efficacy.

A stitch in the side is cured by applying the blood of a rooster which has been sacrificed to St. Martin. On the eve of St. Martin it is customary to sacrifice an animal to the saint, or, as the people express it, they "draw blood for St. Martin." The animal most commonly selected is a rooster, which has been consecrated to this purpose some time in advance. The blood is soaked up with tow or cotton, and preserved as a remedy for the stitch. At the moment of applying it to the side of the sufferer the following words are recited:

"Fear caoin aig a mnaoi b'oirb',
A c'uir Iosa Criosd na luig'e anns a g-colg;
C'uig m'euraib' Iosa Criosd fuascailt do g'reime,
Dearna M'uire agus a Mic leat." *

Which may be thus rendered:

A mild man with the haughty wife,
Who put Jesus Christ lying on the hulls (of the tow);
The five fingers of Jesus Christ to relieve your stitch;
The palm (of the hand) of Mary and of her Son with you.

In Galway the form is somewhat different, and the characters of the man and his wife are reversed. In the same county the blood is sometimes sprinkled upon the different members of the family when the animal is killed, and the words alone are used to cure the stitch, as well as a stomach ache. The words are founded on the legend that Christ once asked permission to stop over night at a house, where the husband, a kind-hearted man, was disposed to accommodate him, but his wife, who was of the opposite disposition, compelled the Savior to sleep on the hulls stripped from the flax. For this reason tow is preferred to cotton. The practice is known throughout the country.

One more instance and we have done. In this case the informant was ignorant of the words which were undoubtedly used, and we have left the simple statement of the medical treatment and its result. The son of well-to do parents in the County Kerry was so crippled by a painful swelling of the leg that he had to be taken to Tralee for treatment. The doctors held a consultation and decided that the limb must be amputated. At this juncture a "traveling woman" from the north—where the people are supposed to have most knowledge in such matters—called on the

* Pronounced, in Kerry: *Fawr ceen ig a mnee wūrav,*
A khûir Esa Creesdh na lee ans a gūlag;
Khuig vaeriv Esa Creesdh fuascalth dhó ghrĕma,
Jawrna Wirra ógus a Mic lath.

father of the young man and asked permission to try her skill. The doctors objected, but the father said that as they had done their best to no purpose, she could do no worse. Having obtained permission, she went out and gathered a quantity of the herb known as *uarac'-a-loc'*,* which she put into water and boiled to a poultice. This was in the middle of the afternoon. She then put the poultice upon the swollen limb, and had the young man tied down to the bed so that he could move neither hand nor foot. In a few hours the poultice began to cause him such terrible agony that, if he had not been so securely fastened down to the bed, the efforts of several men would be required to hold him. This continued for some time, after which the sufferer fell into a sound sleep, which lasted all night. When he woke up in the morning he called out to his father that the poultice had come off. On going to his bedside it was found that the limb had resumed its natural size, which was the cause of the poultice falling off. The young man was able to start home in a short time, and was so overjoyed at his recovery that he walked the entire distance, twelve miles. The cure created a sensation in the vicinity at the time. The herb used is common in pastures and is eaten by cattle with great relish. Its leaves are about an inch across at the base, and from six to ten inches long, and are distinguished by having a semi-circle taken out from one side, which is popularly known as *greim a diab'ail*,† "the devil's bit."

Corresponding Belief in Scotland.

It is an established fact that the ancient connection of cognate nations may be traced in their mythology, even though the people themselves have been separated for ages. This is strikingly true of the Gaelic race of Ireland and the Scottish Highlands. They are still one people, speaking the same language, with but slight dialectic differences, although their fortunes have been widely separated for nearly fifteen centuries, while their customs and beliefs are in a great measure identical. Compare the following cures given by Rev. W. Gregor in an article on "The Healing Art in the North of Scotland in the Olden Time," (in the Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, Vol. iii, 1874.) The coincidence is the more striking as the article had not come to the notice of the writer until the rest of the paper was in type, and consequently no questions could be asked to draw out parallel customs:

Hooping Cough: "Let the first man seen riding on a white horse be asked what is the cure. Whatever he says, is the cure.

"Let the patient be passed three times below the belly of a piebald horse.

"The milk of an ass was an effectual remedy. * * * .

"The patient was held below the animal's head, so as to inhale its

* Pronounced, in Kerry, *oo-ukh-a lukh*; the word appears to be a compound.

† Pronounced, in Kerry, *greem a jeal*.

breath. When this inhalation of breath had been carried on for a considerable time the patient was passed three times under the belly and over the back of the brute."

Ringworm: "The common cure for this disease was rubbing with silver. The modes of rubbing were various."

Warts: "Wrap up in a parcel as many grains of barley as there are warts, and lay it on the public road. Whoever finds and opens it inherits the warts.

"Rub the warts with a piece of raw meat, bury it, and as it decays the warts disappear.

"Wash the warts with water that has collected in the hollow parts of a *layer-stone.*"

Eye Disease: "Catch a live frog and lick the frog's eyes with the tongue. The person who does so has only to lick with the tongue any diseased eye, and a cure is effected." Compare this with the cure for burns.

Rheumatism: "Those who were born with their feet first possessed great power to heal all kinds of sprains, lumbago and rheumatism, either by rubbing the affected part or by trampling on it. The greater virtue lay in the feet."

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